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Contents

	Page
The Ethic Of The Social Gospel	66
Is The Christian Reformed Church Letting The Ethics Of The Social Gospel Stand Unchallenged?	67
Rev. Peter Van Tuinen's Requirement That There Be No Usury In His "Kingdom Of God"	68
Interest At 10% A Month — And Still Not Usury	72
The Immorality Of Making Declarations On Subjects About Which One Is Uninformed	73
Einstein On The Importance Of Being Able To State A Problem	74
Who Has Formulated The Interest Problem Correctly? Moses? Christ? The Medieval Church? Calvin? The Social Gospellers?	74
Böhm-Bawerk's Candid Statement Of The Interest Problem	77
The Logic Substantiating That Scripture Is Unqualifiedly In Favor Of Loan Interest In The Economic Order	83
An Independent Examination Of What Scripture Teaches On Usury, That Is, On Interest	85
Future Articles On Interest And Van Tuinen's Kingdom Of God	91
Coexistence Of Atheism And Christianity	92
Old-Testament Character Of Old Calvinism And Of Progressive Calvinism	95

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The Ethic Of The Social Gospel

The social gospel is the prevailing Protestant religion. It rejects the supernatural and proclaims a system of ethics; that system is its *positive* program. The World Council of Churches, the largest Protestant unit in the world, advocates programs based on the *social* gospel.

What, simply and comprehensively, is the ethic of the social gospel?

The social gospel is a system of ethics which teaches:

1. Public immorality, and

2. Private sanctimoniousness.

1. The teaching of the social gospel in regard to public immorality consists in the doctrine that *covetousness* and *coercion* by people acting in groups, especially through a government, is not only permissible but meritorious. See pages 40-42 in the February 1957 issue of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM.

2. The teaching of the social gospel in regard to private sanctimoniousness consists in the demand to love the neighbor more than the self, and the denial of the unrestricted right to "discriminate," that is, to show preference. See articles in February, March, April and May issues of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM in 1955.

The social gospel is not something that grew out of Scripture. To call that which the social gospel teaches *Christian* is to twist and torture the interpretation of Scripture. The social gospel grew out of something else. It was developed in response to a "need." That "need" was an attempted moral justification of socialism. Take that purpose away from the social gospel and it will collapse. When socialism is eventually discredited, there will not be a social gospel either.

The foregoing can be summarized by saying that the ethic of the social gospel is an *attempted* moral justification of socialism (or its little brother, interventionism). fn

Is The Christian Reformed Church Letting The Ethics Of The Social Gospel Stand Unchallenged?

Solomon made a profound observation and statement:

> *Ecclesiastes 8:11.* Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

This is an interesting proposition. It says that there is a delay or time factor in the operation of cause and effect in the social, political and economic affairs of men. In the field of the natural sciences, if you jump off an elevation you *immediately* begin to fall to the earth. But, says Solomon, the penalty in the field of morality is different; it is not "executed speedily"; the eventual remote effect of folly and sin, he indicates, can long be delayed in human affairs. And so, says Solomon, men having observed that phenomenon take their chances and perform wickedness. Men believe, contrary to what Moses declared, that their "sins will [*not*] find them out." Of course, if the effects of sin were prompt, sin would soon be nonexistent; if the effects were instantaneous, sin would not exist in any real sense, because it would be suicidal in character.

Some of the effects of the malignant ethics of the social gospel are being delayed. But if Moses and Solomon knew what they were talking about, then Christianity, if it is properly to be equated with the social gospel, will eventually have a sorry reputation and will be thoroughly discredited. That will be the outcome when the consequences of the ethics of the social gospel are harvested.

As far as we know there is not a single pronouncement by the Christian Reformed church against the *ethics* of the social gospel. There are men in the Christian Reformed church who, without being molested, teach principles basic to the social gospel. If that is true of a denomination as extraordinary as the Christian Reformed, what will the situation be in other denominations?

No denomination will be doing its duty if it waits until the evil effects of the doctrine of the social gospel are experienced, and only at that late time speaks against it. To have a *prophetic*

message and to speak with *prophetic* power it is necessary that a church speak up against evil at the time that that evil is still popular, and before the time that the fact that that evil *is* evil is substantiated by experience. fn

Rev. Peter Van Tuinen's Requirement That There Be No Usury In His "Kingdom Of God"

We are in this issue continuing with an analysis of the economic gospel of Rev. Peter Van Tuinen, pastor of an Artesia (California) Christian Reformed Church. This is the third instalment of the analysis, the previous instalments appearing in the two immediately preceding issues of PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM (January and February, 1957).

We are exploring the idea whether (1) the *content* of the ethical teaching of Van Tuinen about his Kingdom of God, and (2) the *content* of the ethical teaching of the social gospel about its Kingdom of God are the same thing, or are essentially related. In any event, whether they are essentially the same or not, we ourselves reject the ethic of both the Van Tuinen and the social gospel *Kingdoms of God* as being spurious and un-Biblical.

The first thing to do is to discover carefully of what Van Tuinen's ethical gospel, that is, his gospel for his earthly Kingdom of God, consists.

The economic aspects of his ethical Kingdom of God are indicated by what he has written in his essay, "Calvinism and the Task of the Church for the Solution of Modern Problems" in the book *God-Centered Living or Calvinism in Action* (Baker Book House, 1951, Grand Rapids, Michigan). This book is put out by a self-constituted Calvinistic Action Committee.

Van Tuinen writes, page 40 (our italics):

> We take for granted that the church will preach the gospel demands of justice, charity, honesty, and stewardship, while at the same time [it will] condemn such unchristian economic practices as economic oppression, selfishness, *usury,* and mammonism.

This statement appears innocent enough. It consists of generalities and apparent orthodoxies. But the ideas here expressed need to be thoroughly analyzed to discover whether they really differ from what a regular social gospeller would write.

Some years ago the present editor, as an individual, sent out some economic literature, which is not reconcilable with the social gospel, and also is not reconcilable with Van Tuinen's economic gospel. This literature was a small booklet written by Dr. Ludwig von Mises, entitled, *Middle-of-the-Road Policy Leads to Socialism.* The book simply presents sound economics. Its logic is easy to understand and is wholly convincing.

Sometime thereafter friends informed us of the intense dissatisfaction and hostility of Van Tuinen against the ideas in that booklet and against anyone who would sponsor it. (PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM will send a copy of this booklet to anyone who will write for it.)

We shall proceed with the analysis.

With the intent of being specific and analytical we have begun our consideration of Van Tuinen's economic gospel by an analysis of his condemnation of *usury* (see quotation in the foregoing). Van Tuinen condemns usury; in PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM we are in favor of usury.

We use the word *usury* in its exact Biblical sense, namely, *any* interest on money or things loaned, whether that interest is at a high rate or a low rate.

There is, however, it should be carefully noted, a modern meaning to *usury* which cannot be applied to the Biblical statements on usury, because Moses in his legislation on usury at no time refers to the modern idea. That modern *idea* is that interest is permissible provided it is not extortionate or oppressive, that is, provided the interest rate is not "too high." He did not condemn high interest rates and approve low interest rates.

The King James English translation of the Old Testament invariably uses the word *usury.* That is the old, regular English word for *interest* generally. When modern usage restricted the

word usury to high interest rates *only,* then *usury* no longer was an adequate translation. Therefore, the more modern translation of the Old Testament, the American Standard Version (which is the recommended translation in the Christian Reformed church), changes the King James word *usury* in all texts on interest, to *interest* which is the correct modern word that refers to what Moses wrote.

Our interpretation of what Moses wrote is that he was in no real sense opposed to interest as a part of the economic order, whether that interest be appraised as high interest (usury, in the modern sense) or whether that interest be appraised as moderate or low, and known merely as *interest* (in modern times). Yes, indeed; there is a special, limited Biblical injunction against usury and in that limited and not presently significant aspect we also are against usury; otherwise, not. We shall eventually come to that.

Everything that Van Tuinen may say about usury, if he wishes to build his case against *high* interest rates only, is (this should be carefully noted) wholly unscriptural. If Moses is alleged to condemn usury in the modern sense *only,* then that statement is obviously contrary to Scripture. Whatever Moses may have condemned, it was not high interest rates versus low interest rates.

When a reader appraises carefully what Van Tuinen wants so that the Van Tuinen Kingdom of God will come into existence on this earth, then it is evident that the major part of his program is an *economic* reformation and rebirth. Society is to be reborn by the destruction of basic *economic* evils, and one of the four which Van Tuinen selects for attention is usury. Obviously, if a high interest rate is bad, then a lower interest rate is better. But equally clearly, Paradise is not attained, the Van Tuinen Kingdom will not come in perfect glory unless interest rates go lower and lower until finally there will be no interest rates at all. Then, in an economic sense, the Van Tuinen Kingdom will have arrived — all interest will have been abolished, and the hosannas can be shouted. The argument might be put this way: if there is to be no interest in heaven, there should be no interest in an earthly Kingdom of God.

This is not one whit different from the socialist utopias. The socialists also condemn high interest, medium interest, low interest, any interest. Their Kingdom of God will also be established when there is no more interest to be paid.

There are moral legislators who today know less about sound principles of legislation than Moses did 3,300 years ago. Moses made, shall we say, "absolute" laws. He did not make laws based on "degrees" or on adverbial phrases such as "too high" or "too low." Moses probably knew that every law based on "degrees" is not enforceable except tyrannically, that is, according to the unpredictable judgment of a judge or a bureaucratic commission. Van Tuinen does not indicate what he might consider to be *usury* and what he might consider to be proper *interest.* Nobody can define that. It is impossible to have *any* standard on what is too high or too low an interest rate in a moral sense. Anyone who endeavors to enforce a discretionary law, one based on degrees, eventually becomes an arbitrary bureaucrat, a tyrant and an oppressor, human nature being what it is.

Efforts to legislate morality by "degrees" have proven disastrous. Such legislation can be described as legalized *casuistry.* The dictionary defines *casuistry* as "the science or doctrine of resolving doubtful cases of conscience of right and wrong according to injunctions of sacred books or of individual authority or social conventions, rather than on grounds of moral reason." Any attempt for a clergyman to define *usury* as being *too-high* an interest rate is casuistry.

In regard to casuistry two statements should be made: (1) Calvinists have historically been unsympathetic to casuistry. They have insisted on avoiding sumptuary laws and other manifestations of casuistry. Casuistry is completely foreign to the genius of Calvinism. (2) Further, some members of the famous Jesuit order specialized for a time on casuistry (consider Escobar and others). This excursion into casuistry was disastrous for the reputation of this great religious order. It may be doubted whether it will ever be able to "live down" all the disrepute it received from casuistically measuring morals. Some of those moralists developed ideas such as that it was all right for a Frenchman to kill another Frenchman honorably in a supervised duel, but that an Italian

might under certain circumstances knife you in the back on a dark and lonely road.

Van Tuinen will end up with similar disastrous results if he wishes to appraise *interest* or *usury* casuistically. fn

Interest At 10% A Month—And Still Not Usury

Last month while working out of town, several other men and I had lunch at the hotel. Two brothers gave me a ride back to the plant. As we were getting into the car one of them stopped, and pointing at the brick building near which their car was parked, said, "That is the building where our grandfather began the company."

That started the brothers on a chain of reminiscences. The grandfather had come from New York state, where the family had given their name to a city of substantial size. He had picked a location which he thought would turn out to be the city which Chicago now is. Although he had miscalculated that, he had prospered.

The grandfather had a brother named Obadiah, who participated in the Gold Rush to California in 1849. Obadiah wrote to his brother back in the Middle West that if he had the money available for loans, he would do well to send it to California. Obadiah wrote that "the interest rate here is 10% *a month.*"

The grandsons giving me the information emphasized the "10% *a month.*"

We pondered the rate. Without compounding it, the rate was (12 months times 10%) 120% a year. This compares with an ordinary rate of 5% or 6% a year.

We wondered whether Rev. Peter Van Tuinen out in California now would consider an interest rate of 120% a year in California in 1849 to be usury.

Under the circumstances or any similar circumstances — we would not.

Scripture does not condemn such a rate anywhere. The facts are simple. Great profits could be made in California. The men who were there had traversed the desert under appalling hardships. Many had died on the way. No one would have attempted the trip unless the rewards were very high. They were. *Capital,* that is, funds to loan, were scarce and the profit to be made on those funds were enormous. But nobody would pay the high rate *unless he expected to make a profit even higher.*

No charity or poverty was involved in this situation. It was a *business* situation and a *business* rate of interest. No man lived who was wise enough to regulate the interest rate in California as *usury,* or as valid interest. No man living today is wise enough to determine interest rates in the United States or any other country by *a priori* or moralistic reasoning. The interest rate can be determined validly *only by a free market.* fn

The Immorality Of Making Declarations On Subjects About Which One Is Uninformed

We condemn as immoral the making of statements about any subject on which the speaker is not informed.

We remember a distinction made to us by Dr. Ludwig von Mises in a private conversation, to the effect that:

1. It is not only improper to declare as true what we know to be untrue; but

2. It is equally improper to declare as true what we do not definitely know to be true, that is, it is unethical to make positive statements on subjects regarding which we lack adequate knowledge.

This is not Van Tuinen's ethics. He makes a bold statement about an economic question which he gives no evidence of really knowing to be true or untrue.

Von Mises's ethics are more restrictive than Van Tuinen's. They are the ethics of a conscientious scientist and thinker. fn

Einstein On The Importance Of Being Able To State A Problem

Einstein has declared that the prerequisite to the solution of a problem is the *ability to state the problem correctly.* We believe that that proposition is sound and illuminating.

Einsten and his collaborator, Infeld, wrote as follows in *The Evolution Of Physics,* (Simon and Schuster, 1938, New York, page 95, our italics):

> Galileo formulated the problem of determining the velocity of light, but did not solve it. *The formulation of a problem is often more essential than its solution,* which may be merely a matter of mathematical or experimental skill. To raise new problems, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle, requires creative imagination and marks real advance in science.

Modern physics requires the use of complex equations; the problem is not to *solve* the equations but to *state* them. A robot computing machine can sometimes be used to solve equations once they are *stated;* it is the *statement* of the equation which is the difficult task. fn

Who Has Formulated The Interest Problem Correctly? Moses? Christ? The Medieval Church? Calvin? The Social Gospellers?

No ancient, medieval or early modern moralist, to our knowledge, was ever able to state the *interest* problem correctly, let alone solve it.

Consider the actual history of the interest problem in Scripture and in the doctrine of the churches.

1. Moses did not "state" the *interest* problem. He did not even attempt it. If someone alleges that Moses did legislate wonderfully on *interest,* what was it, legislation on charity or on business? Or was it racial legislation? If the legislation was differ-

ent for a Hebrew from what it was for a gentile, then it was not general legislation on interest, but racial, or national or geographical legislation. What, in fact, are the important characteristics of Moses's pronouncement on interest? In the first place, his pronouncement is racial; in the second place, it pertains to charity and not to business, that is, it pertains to personal matters rather than the economic order. In short, for Moses, the *interest* problem was merely an aspect of the *charity* problem cast in a *racial* setting. For him, interest was no *business* problem at all.

2. Fourteen centuries pass and we come to the time of Christ. Christ nowhere made any statement condemning interest generally. In his parables he assumed that *interest* was a natural and wholesome institution (Van Tuinen to the contrary notwithstanding). In other words, Christ did not state a problem because he apparently held that no "problem" existed.

3. Another five to fifteen centuries pass. The religious world is dominated by the medieval church. The church undertook to do what neither Moses nor Christ had done. The church said that interest is a business problem and that collecting interest is generally forbidden to gentiles as well as Jews. It condemned in the *business* field what neither Moses nor Christ had condemned.

4. In the sixteenth century — 3,000 years after Moses — a long time, by the way, for so little progress to be made by interpreting and reinterpreting Scripture repetitiously, John Calvin impatiently brushes all the past on *interest* behind him and declares that the problem is not racial, nor a question of charity.

We quoted in our February 1957 issue Böhm-Bawerk's summary of Calvin's position on interest. Calvin declared that interest was a *business* question; he stated the problem with clarity and simplicity, namely: *loan interest is proper because the borrower himself can make money from the borrowing; why then should he not pay interest?* This is in no sense charity. (Note that Calvin never got beyond *loan* interest. His view was very circumscribed.)

On this subject that loan interest *is* a proper business institution, Calvin was (as the expression goes) "as right as rain."

(We shall consider Calvin's lamentable qualifications to his general proposition later.)

5. Another 400 years have elapsed since Calvin's day. The church — the social gospel part of it, *if it is a part* — has addressed itself again to the *interest problem.* It formulates the *interest* question differently than ever before. Interest is no longer a problem of loan interest only, but of interest generally, and on this question the social gospellers give either of two answers:

a. Interest is basically wrong. This is the most frequent answer by social gospel leaders, as they are nearly all socialists; or

b. Interest must be regulated and must not be permitted to be high. This is the answer of the "middle-of-the-roaders," the interventionists, which is what some members of the Christian Reformed churches are.

Here we have five different formulations of the interest problem:

1. Moses treated it as a *racial charity* problem.

2. Christ treated it as a *general business* problem and acceptable without question.

3. The medieval church (up to the 15th century) treated it as a restricted *business* problem in the *loan* interest field only — and *forbidden.*

4. John Calvin treated it as a restricted *business* problem in the *loan* interest field only — and *approved.*

5. The social gospel treats the problem as a general *business* problem, involving not only *loan* interest, but also *rents* and *profits* (which have a common origin with loan interest) — and either (a) *condemns* it or (b) wishes to *regulate* it according to some bureaucratic judgment.

We ask, which of the five is the best formulation of the problem?

Our answer is that unquestionably the best formulation is that by the social gospel. The interest problem is far broader than Moses's racial charity, or the medieval church's moral concern, or Calvin's comparative appraisal based on land rents or profits. It is only the social gospel that has *stated* the interest problem correctly. However, the *social gospellers* did not first formulate it correctly. It is the socialists who *first* stated it correctly. The social gospel is only repeating the problem formulated by the socialists.

The socialists, although they *formulated* the problem correctly, arrived at an incorrect answer. Certain modern economists are the only persons who have stated the interest problem correctly and also found the correct answer. That correct answer is in harmony with Scripture.

If the question is asked, whose *answer* was the best, as distinguished from whose *statement* of the problem was the best, then there can be no question at all that Christ's was the best. His answer *approved* interest *basically*. He did not raise the problem nor attempt to state it because on the question of interest his views obviously were diametrically opposed to those of the modern social gospel, the socialists, or anyone who disapproves of usury in a broad sense as being improper in a well-organized economic order. Interest exists because there is a *welfareshortage* (see PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, July 1956, page 209). Anyone who questions interest must in his premises disagree with the idea that a welfareshortage is inherent for this life. Christ's ancient premises were those of Moses and of sound modern economic theory. fn

Bohm-Bawerk's Candid Statement Of The Interest Problem

Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk (1851-1914) wrote one of the most famous economic treatises ever written; it is in three volumes. The collective name for the three is *Capital and Interest*. The first volume has the individual title *History and Critique of Interest Theories*. The first chapter in Volume I has the title, "The Problem of Interest." Here, finally, 3,300 years after Moses, Böhm-

Bawerk, one of the great economists, addresses himself to the comprehensive *problem* of interest. At least we can expect of Böhm-Bawerk what could not reasonably have been expected of Moses, the medieval church, Calvin or the social gospel — a carefully-formulated *statement* of the interest problem.

This is how Böhm-Bawerk begins:

THE PROBLEM OF INTEREST*

1. What The Theoretical Problem Of Interest Deals With

Whoever is the owner of a capital sum is ordinarily able to derive from it a permanent net income which goes under the scientific name of interest in the broad sense of the term.

This income is distinguished by certain notable characteristics.

It arises independently of any personal act of the capitalist. It accrues to him even though he has not moved a finger in creating it, and therefore seems in a peculiar sense to arise from capital or, to use a very old metaphor, to be begotten by it. It can be derived from any capital, no matter what be the kind of goods of which the capital consists, from naturally fruitful, as well as from barren goods, from perishable as well as from durable goods, from replaceable as well as from irreplaceable goods, from money as well as from commodities. And, finally, it flows without ever exhausting the capital from which it arises, and therefore without any necessary limit to its continuance. It is, if one may use such an expression in mundane matters, capable of everlasting life.

And so the phenomenon of interest presents, on the whole, the remarkable picture of a lifeless thing, capital, producing an everlasting and inexhaustible supply of goods. And this remarkable phenomenon appears in economic life with such perfect regularity that the very

*From a translation by George D. Huncke and Hans F. Sennholz to be published later this year.

concept of capital has often been founded upon it. Thus Hermann, in his *Staatswirtschaftliche Untersuchungen* defines capital as "wealth which produces a constant flow of income without itself suffering any diminution in exchange value."

Whence and why does the capitalist receive this endless and effortless flow of wealth? These words contain the problem of the theory of interest. That problem will be solved when the actual fact of the drawing of interest, together with all its essential characteristics, is fully described and explained. But the explanation must be complete both in compass and in depth. In compass, inasmuch as all forms and varieties of interest will be explained. In depth, inasmuch as the explanation must be carried without a break to the very limits of economic research; that is to say, to those final, simple acknowledged facts which the science of economics itself regards as axiomatic and does not profess to prove, facts on which economics rests, and the further explanation of which, if it be demanded, must be furnished by related sciences, especially psychology and the natural sciences.

2. How The Theoretical Problem Differs From The Social Problem Of Interest

The "theoretical" problem of interest must be sharply differentiated from the "social" problem of interest. While the former asks only why interest exists, the latter asks whether it is entitled to exist, whether it is just, is right, is useful, is good, and therefore whether it is to be retained, modified or abolished. While the theoretical problem deals exclusively with the causes of interest, the social problem deals principally with its effects. And while the theoretical problem is concerned only with the truth, the social problem is attentive primarily to expediency.

But this differentiation between the two problems is no sharper than that which applies to the arguments that

are urged on behalf of each, and to the exactness of the proof which is presented in the respective fields. In one case the argument is concerned only with truth or falsehood, while in the other it is concerned for the most part with expediency. While there is but one answer to the *wherefore* of interest, and one which compels acknowledgment in the mind of anyone who applies the laws of logic correctly, it is largely a matter of opinion whether interest is just, right and useful. The most cogent argumentation on this point, though it may convince many who thought otherwise, will never convert all of them. Let us suppose, for instance, that by the soundest of reasoning it were established that the abolition of interest would inevitably be followed by a decline in the material welfare of the civilized world. The argument would still have no weight with the person who, applying a standard of his own, lays no great store by material welfare anyway. For such a person would doubtless argue that earthly life is but a short moment in comparison with eternity, and that the material wealth to which interest ministers, will hinder rather than help man in the attainment of his eternal destiny.

Prudence urgently demands that these two fundamentally different problems be sharply differentiated in scientific investigation. It cannot be denied that they stand in close relation to each other. Indeed, it appears to me that there is no better way of coming to a correct decision on the question whether interest be a good thing, than by a correct understanding of the causes which have given rise to it. But this relationship entitles us only to correlate the results of our investigations, not to confuse the investigations themselves.

We wish to call attention to the following points:

1. Böhm-Bawerk considers *interest* in its broad economic meaning, a return on *capital,* that is, a return on money, or land, or other capital (factories, shops, machines, etc.). This meaning applied to *interest* is broader than the meaning of the term in

prohibitions (?) on interest in Scripture. Scripture applies the term *interest* only as a return on money, on a loan.

2. When Böhm-Bawerk uses *interest* in that broad sense he is stating candidly what John Calvin implied, namely, that the income from money (from a loan) is related to and apparently dependent on income from land or capital. Readers will remember that John Calvin justified interest on the ground that a man with capital could get a return from land (that is, he could get *rent*), and that *therefore* it was common sense that he should get interest on money loaned (see PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM, February 1957, pages 55-63). Calvin reasoned this way: if a man can get a return from land but not on money he might loan to someone else to buy the land, that would result in nobody loaning money anymore and people with capital would put it to use themselves at farming land which they would buy with their own money. The shocking weakness of this argument, which is correct as far as it goes, is that it explains *loan* interest by *land* interest (that is, rent), but that it does not explain the validity of rent itself. By stating the problem of interest in *broad* terms, Böhm-Bawerk makes clear that he will not assume the existence of land interest (rent) when he is explaining *loan* interest. Calvin took *land rent for granted*. He accepted land rent with all the simplicity of Moses and the other scriptural authorities. Calvin merely thought sensibly in the Old and New Testament tradition. Then he utilized his logical and sensible brain and explained *loan* interest by *land* interest. But it never occurred to him that *land* interest itself needed explanation.

3. After Calvin's time a new school of thought arose — the socialist. This school of thought became important with Karl Marx and his successors. Marx did not attack *loan* interest only, he attacked *all* interest — every kind of return on every kind of ownership of things (capital). Marx was no paltry quibbler about interest or usury *on money*; he laid the axe to the tree of capital, and struck blows to wipe out all return on capital. In other words, it was the socialists who really attacked the broad interest problem basically. Calvin's argument would be sneered at by Marx. If he had lived in Calvin's day Marx would have attacked Calvin's idea on interest by saying: you say that *loan* interest is justified by *land* interest; it is just the reverse, loan interest is not justified be-

cause land interest is not justified. In what we have just quoted from Böhm-Bawerk, his broad statement of the problem stems from the basic issue raised by socialism. That is the reason why *Capital and Interest* is a critically significant and comprehensive study of the controversy between *capitalism* and *socialism.*

4. Böhm-Bawerk does not minimize the problem. He candidly begins by saying that there is "permanent income"; which seems to have "everlasting life"; even though the owner "has not moved a finger in creating" that income; then he asks, "*Whence and why does the capitalist receive this endless and effortless flow of wealth?*" And then he says: "These words contain the problem of the theory of interest." In other words, whence and why does anyone get an *unearned* income? The socialists say it is immoral to get any unearned income.

5. Next Böhm-Bawerk carefully separates two problems: (1) the theoretical problem of interest, and (2) the social problem of interest. He writes: "While the former asks only why interest exists, the latter asks whether it is entitled to exist, whether it is just, is right, is useful, is good, and whether it is to be retained, modified or abolished." Van Tuinen has never thought of the first problem, the theoretical one; he concerns himself only with the second problem. But logically the first problem, *why* it exists, should precede the second problem, *should* it exist. If it should be discovered that *why* it exists is inevitable, or that it is inescapable from the "nature of things," then the *social* question is really nonsensical. If interest *must* exist because of the nature of creation (not because of the nature of the Fall of Adam), then it is futile and wasting time to argue whether interest *should* exist.

6. In the *interest* question, therefore, as raised by Marx and other socialists, the *whole moral structure of Moses and the gospels is questioned and attacked.* Socialism, it may be confidently asserted, cannot be reconciled with the Hebrew-Christian religion; it is either/or — either Christian ethics or socialist ethics. The term, *Christian socialist,* is an absurdity. There are no Christian socialists in any common sense meaning of the term. Should Paul Tillich, or Karl Barth or Emil Brunner or Reinhold Nie-

buhr describe themselves as *Christian* socialists, the idea involves demonstrable, profound ignorance. And when Van Tuinen brings up the rear of the procession, declaring that he assumes that all good Calvinists are against *usury*, which in Scripture means loan interest, it is obvious that he is either uninformed or he had abandoned the moral teachings of Scripture.

7. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that Marx deviated so radically in his thinking from Moses and all other Scripture writers, that he stated a fundamental issue, one of the most important, overwhelming ethical issues between men. If the theory of interest of socialism is to replace the theory of interest of Moses and Scripture, the morality taught by Moses cannot exist any more. It is, therefore, unbelievably silly for Calvinists or other Christians to join a *Partij van den Arbeid* (Labor Party) in the Netherlands, which aims at reconciling Calvinism and socialism or its little brother, interventionism. It is, therefore, also pathetic to see the *Anti-Revolutionary Party*, an old Calvinist party in the Netherlands, moving in the same direction in order not to lose members. And it is equally ridiculous to accept ideas put out on the interest question in *God-Centered Living or Calvinism in Action* published by the self-styled Calvinistic Action Committee. The correct description is that this is a lamentable modern degeneration of Calvinism. fn

The Logic Substantiating That Scripture Is Unqualifiedly In Favor Of Loan Interest In The Economic Order

With the help of John Calvin, and far more so of Karl Marx, and finally with the help of Böhm-Bawerk we can reach a highly probable conclusion, namely, that Scripture in principle is *unqualifiedly* in favor of loan interest in all human interrelations excepting a special group of charity cases.

Marx had no illusions about that; he hated the Christian religion intensely; the issue on which he based his hatred was the existence of interest; he knew right well that the Hebrew-Christian

religion did not teach on interest what he taught. But this awareness of the issue is lost to the Tillichs, Barths, Niebuhrs and Van Tuinens.

Let us reason simply and easily:

1. Loan interest is not separable *in kind* from rent or profits, the two other kinds of interest. Loan interest is not dependent on land rent or profits, but all these three forms of unearned income have a common cause or origin. They all stand or fall together, because they have that common cause (which we are not now explaining) and because they are interchangeable among each other.

2. If Scripture should condemn one of the three forms of interest but accept the others, then Scripture would obviously be illogical. There are only two positions possible: (a) all business interest in all forms is in principle sound; or (b) all business interest in all forms is in principle unsound.

3. Scripture does not condemn any of these forms of interest. It accepts as normal, and not-to-be-criticized, land and capital and money ownership, and the income from them. True, Moses prohibited taking interest from *poor* Israelites; he carefully makes that qualification. He nowhere says that interest *as a business transaction* is prohibited. When Moses wrote about interest he was writing about a phase of charity and not of business or the economic order.

4. A specific return on capital, that is, interest (loan interest, rent, profits) is associated with an *ownership* of capital. Ownership without income from ownership is without meaning. Any alleged ownership without the income from or use derived from the ownership is a pseudo-ownership. *Ownership* is prized largely because of the income (interest) that accompanies the ownership. Everything in Scripture assumes the validity of ownership and the benefits of ownership. Why, in fact, have a commandment, Thou shalt not steal, if ownership and the interest from ownership were invalid?

5. The wide, varied, post-Biblical confusion on the validity of interest is not a confusion that existed in Biblical times.

6. In the present-day sense, the interest problem is hardly 100 years old. The socialists finally in the latest 100 years stated the real issue and gave a *wholly* different answer to that issue than had *ever* been given before. The social gospel, being nothing more than an attempted moral bodyguard of socialism, has taken over the socialist answer to the interest problem.

7. In the present-day dispute on the enlarged, properly stated real issue, Scripture and socialism take diametrically opposite positions: (a) nowhere does Scripture question interest in a comprehensive business and economic order sense; but (b) at every point socialism and the social gospel and its camp followers question the morality of interest, that is, *unearned* income. fn

An Independent Examination Of What Scripture Teaches On Usury, That Is, On Interest

The problem finally having been stated, let us now turn to what Scripture legislates on interest. The key texts in Scripture have already been quoted, pages 46 and 47, in the February 1957 issue, which see.

Before analyzing these texts independently, it will be well to know what acknowledged Bible commentators or encyclopedias say about these texts on interest.

We quote from the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.*

First, in regard to *interest* (our italics):

> *Interest.* The Hebrew word *neshekh* is from a root which means "to bite"; thus interest is "something bitten off." The other word, *mashsha'*, means "lending on interest." The Greek term is from the root *tikto,* "to produce" or "beget," hence interest is something begotten or produced by money. The Hebrew words are usually translated "usury," but this meant the same as interest, *all interest being reckoned as usury.*

Long before Abraham's time money had been loaned at a fixed rate of interest in Babylonia and almost certainly in Egypt. The Code of Hammurabi gives regulations regarding the lending and borrowing of money, the usual interest being 20 percent. Sometimes it was only 11-2/3 and 13-1/3, as shown by contract tablets. In one case, if the loan was not paid in two months, 18 percent interest would be charged. Corn, dates, onions, etc., were loaned at interest. Thus Moses and Israel would be familiar with commercial loans and interest. *In Israel there was no system of credit or commercial loans in Moses' time and after. A poor man borrowed because he was poor.* The law of Moses (Exodus 22:25) forbade loaning at interest. There was to be no creditor and no taker on interest among them (Leviticus 25:36, 37). Deuteronomy permits them to lend on interest to a foreigner (Deuteronomy 23:19, 20), but not to a brother Israelite. That this was considered the proper thing in Israel for centuries is seen is Psalm 15:5, while Proverbs 28:8 implies that it was an unusual thing, interest being generally exacted and profit made. Ezekiel condemns it as a heinous sin (Ezekiel 18:13, 17) and holds up the ideal of righteousness as not taking interest (22:12). Isaiah 24:2 implies that it was a business in that age, the lender and borrower being social types. Jeremiah implies that there was not always the best feeling between lender and borrowers (15:10). According to Nehemiah 5:7, 10, rich Jews were lending to others and exacting heavy interest. Nehemiah condemns such conduct and forbids its continuance, citing himself as an example of lending without interest. The lenders restored one percent of that exacted.

In the New Testament, references to interest occur in the parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:23) and of the Talents (Matthew 25:27). Here the men expected to put their master's money out at interest, and condemnation followed the failure to do so. Thus the principle of receiving interest is not condemned in the Old Testa-

ment, only it was not to be taken from a brother Israelite. In the New Testament it is distinctly encouraged. See also usury. —J. J. Reeve

Next, in regard to *usury*:

Usury. The Hebrew law concerning exaction of interest upon loans was very humane. Hebrews were to lend to their brethren without interest (Exodus 22:25); Leviticus 25:36f.; Deuteronomy 23:19f.). This however, did not apply to a stranger (Deuteronomy 23:20) . . . A fact generally overlooked is that here in Israel commercial loans were practically unknown; Christian sentiment still condemns interest on eleemosynary loans. Oppressive abuses arose during the exile. Nehemiah forced the people after the return to give back exactions of "one hundredth," or one percent monthly which they took from their brethren (Nehemiah 5:10f.; cf. Ezekiel 22:12). A good citizen of Zion is one who put not out his money to usury (Psalm 15:5). One who is guilty of this comes to disaster (Proverbs 28:8).

The Greek word is *rókos, tókos,* lit. "offspring," interest springing out of the principal. Money lenders were numerous among the Jews in Christ's day, and, in the parable of the Talents, He represents the lord of the unprofitable servant as rebuking the sloth in the words, "I should have received mine own with interest." —Edward Bagby Pollard

The outstanding ideas in these two independent statements by writers for the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* are:

1. Usury and interest meant exactly the same thing in Scripture.

2. Interest rates were very high is business — 20%, 11-2/3%, 13-1/3%, 18%, 1% monthly or 12% a year. No 5% or 6% as in our day.

3. The loans about which Moses legislates were not business loans at all, but what we might call "pawn shop" type of

loans; as Reeve says, "A poor man borrowed because he was poor." This was not the Prudential Life Insurance Company loaning money to the United States Steel Corporation.

4. Christ approved of interest. Reeve writes, "In the New Testament it [interest or usury] is distinctly encouraged"; and Pollard writes, ". . . in the parable of the Talents, [Christ] represents the lord of the unprofitable servant as rebuking the sloth in the words, 'I should have received mine own with interest.' "

5. "In Israel," according to Pollard, "commercial loans were practically unknown." And Reeve writes, "In Israel there was no system of credit or commercial loans in Moses' time and after."

From the foregoing, if it is reliable, an obvious conclusion can be reached, namely, that there is nothing in Scripture which condemns *commercial* loans and interest. But that must be the type of loans to which Van Tuinen's "usury" refers, as he is legislating for an economic order which is to be his Kingdom. He considers it so nondebatable that he says he assumes everybody will agree to his assumption.

Clearly, then, Van Tuinen has not the slightest warrant for condemning commercial interest or usury *on the basis of Scripture.*

We have previously shown (February 1957 issue, pages 55-57) that Calvin favored business loans and interest, and so Van Tuinen cannot have an objection against usury in his economic order (Kingdom of God) by quoting Calvin as an authority.

But Van Tuinen is in agreement with the Tillichs, Barths, Brunners, Niebuhrs and other social gospellers. And they in turn are in agreement with the socialists, fully or partially.

It will be worthwhile to re-read carefully Moses's texts on interest; they are:

> *Exodus 22:25.* If thou lend money to any of my people with thee that is poor, thou shalt not be to him as a creditor; neither shall ye lay upon him interest.

Leviticus 25:35-37. And if thy brother be waxed poor, and his hand fail with thee; then thou shalt uphold him; as a stranger and a sojourner shall he live with thee. Take thou no interest of him or increase, but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give thy money upon interest, nor give him thy victuals for increase.

Deuteronomy 23:19-20. Thou shalt not lend upon interest to thy brother; interest of money, interest of victuals, interest of anything that is lent upon interest. Unto a foreigner thou mayest lend upon interest; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon interest, that Jehovah thy God may bless thee. . .

In Exodus 22:25 Moses clearly limits his legislation on loans "to any of my people with thee *that is poor.*" Moses is talking about loans made to people desperate for the necessaries of life. He is legislating in the field of charity, not business and the economic order.

In Exodus 25:35-37 he similarly restricts his legislation to loans for urgent, consumer needs or loans to people who are in personal trouble; he begins, "And if thy brother be *waxed poor,* and his hand fail with thee. . .

In the Deuteronomy text we get a distinction on loans from Hebrew to Hebrew versus from Hebrew to foreigners. We believe it is reasonable to declare that the ground for the distinction was that a loan to a foreigner would be a business loan, a transaction on both sides for profit. We would put this in modern language, thus: thou shalt not lend upon interest to a desperate, stricken poor neighbor who needs charity and not a loan; but go ahead and lend on interest to anybody abroad with whom you wish to do business, and whose transactions with you are designed by him to be profitable to himself. For example, say a merchant from Sidon wished to do business with a Hebrew in Jerusalem. But say that it was worth 2% a month for 3 months (a rate of 24% a year) to the man from Sidon not to pay until the end of 3 months. Moses said: that will be all right. It is common sense to view it that way.

We are finally down to the prohibition by Moses on what appear to be consumer (not commercial) loans. It could be argued that consumer loans are now approved by public opinion; many of the people of the United States buy articles on an instalment basis; such loans are loans for consumption goods.

The modern "consumer loan" however cannot be the kind of loan to which Moses referred. Jones today may buy an automobile on instalment payments. But this is not a loan to "the poor" referred to by Moses. Moses was referring to someone getting a loan for the absolute necessaries of life: food, clothing and shelter. A loan on a $3,000 automobile is not a loan of Moses's kind. Such a loan has security behind it, namely, the automobile itself and the insurance policy representing its value.

The abjectly poor in Moses's day were poor because of misfortune or folly.

If their poverty was due to misfortune (sickness, death of a member of the family, storms, droughts, shipwreck, etc.), they were entitled to charity in the economy Moses set up. If they were destitute because of misfortune, then they were entitled to more than a loan plus interest; they were entitled to something better, namely, a loan without interest. They were entitled in some cases to even more, a plain gift, charity.

We are finally left with the problem of loans to the very poor in Moses's time who were poor because of their folly, their genuine lack of judgment or self control—drunkenness, laziness, gambling, taking unreasonable and dangerous risks, lack of foresight. Should those people be loaned money at exorbitant rates or any rate? We imagine Moses pondering in his mind the probable facts in such a case—a fool borrowing and a skinflint lending. What should he legislate? A law which would make the lender greedy, pursuing a would-be borrower who lacked judgment, and urging him to borrow because he (the lender) could exact an outrageous interest? We believe that Moses wrote with a firm and unhesitating and wise hand: *no interest may be charged from somebody whose plight is already proof of his folly or misfortune.*

Such, we are sure, is the only meaning that the Mosaic law against usury can have, to wit, legislation against the exploitation

of the poor, and the seduction of the foolish. On that Moses was admirably right.

The other texts in the Old Testament obviously must cover similar cases to those which we have described. If they did cover other kinds of cases (commercial loans) who can establish that those remarks are absolute or general norms. If anyone so declares, he is obviously unrealistic; the whole modern, free world is honeycombed with the income and the cost of interest. fn

Future Articles On Interest And Van Tuinen's Kingdom Of God

Van Tuinen wants an earthly Kingdom of God. That earthly Kingdom of God is his idea of a proper economic order, or commercial structure. One of the characteristics that he blandly assumes everybody will agree should not exist in this Van Tuinen economic order (Kingdom of God) is *usury*. *Usury* in Scripture means interest, *all* interest, high or low. But only elementary knowledge of economics permits one to reach the conclusion that Van Tuinen does not understand what is involved in the interest problem. What he says about usury is un-Biblical and uneconomic twaddle.

We lack space, however, in this issue to complete our analysis of the validity of usury. We wish to consider Calvin's proposed restrictions on interest qualifying his general approval of interest. We wish further to consider the famous argument of Henry George which, if correct, destroys Calvin's logic on interest. We wish, also, to consider the close relationship of Van Tuinen's idea on usury to the standard un-Biblical idea on usury of the social gospel. We wish, further, to recast the problem of interest (usury) in an entirely different form and consider the reason why the experts on the social order in the Christian Reformed church avoid answering a simple, pertinent question. It will become evident that the answer they will have to give will betray that the principle which underlies their so-called Calvinist and Reformed position is baldly un-Biblical.

Then after completion of our discussion of usury we plan to consider another "evil" which Van Tuinen does not want in his Kingdom of God, namely, *selfishness.* We do not agree with Van Tuinen on *selfishness* any more than we agree to his reactionary, medieval, un-Biblical ideas on usury. fn

Coexistence Of Atheism And Christianity!

Communism, by definition and nature, must be aggressive toward and destructive of all opposition. Its methods are both violent and threatening on the one hand, and blandishing and subversive on the other hand.

Communism should be recognized as an inveterate and mortal enemy. Its pretense of being for peace should not be interpreted as any relinquishment of its designs for expansion, but only as a change in tactics, or utilization of a supplemental tactic. No move by communism, whether threatening, violent, concessionary, cooperative, or mild, should be viewed as a genuinely friendly move, but only as a change in method in order to harm more effectively.

One of the bulwarks against communism and its associated atheism is historic Christianity. Christianity endeavors to survive not by might, but by its spirit. The attack by communism and the atheism associated with it on Christianity is not likely to be by open warfare, but by imprisonment, torture, brain-washing, and also by fine talk of peace and coexistence. Such beguiling words are especially dangerous.

What communism has done and is doing to the Christian churches and their members is well known, although some people are easily talked into believing that world-wide communism would not spell the end of the Christian church as we know it today. In addition to the brutal oppression of church members by communists and their effective suppression of *genuine* church activity, there is today also their siren call to peace and tolerance and *coexistence.*

This is not an imaginary danger. Consider what appears in *Soviet Survey,* a pro-communist publication, put out in England

(25 Haymarket, London S.W.1). Issue Number 10, for November 1956 has an article entitled "Dialogue with the Churches" by George Lukacs, a communist ideologist. In this article Lukacs makes the following points; he is addressing fellow communists:

1. There is a new situation in world culture. There is the potential development of a situation of *coexistence*. This can be extended to the field of religion, a field which he says "we [the communists] tend to neglect." Lukacs wishes to promote coexistence between communism and religion; (shall *we* say atheism and Christianity?).

2. He quotes Lenin's idea that interest in religion in our time is a by-product of the "insecurity created by capitalist living conditions." The corollary idea is that under communism everybody, including former preachers, will be so secure that they will not need Christianity to sustain them.

3. Next, Lukacs comes to his hope of obtaining an ally for communism (and atheism) in the western churches. He has two hopes, the Protestants and the Catholics.

4. In regard to the Protestants he begins with the "Dane, Kierkegaard" (1813-1855) whom he (Lukacs) describes as an "uncommonly reactionary thinker" because he had the Lutheran idea that "all authorities are instituted by God," which Lukacs correctly interprets in practical affairs as the doctrine that people "are obliged to support the government of the day, no matter what it is." Then Lukacs goes on to mention his white hopes, Niemoller and Barth and their followers. He makes the point that Niemoller and Barth

(a) were not only opposed to Hitler; but

(b) "are in opposition to the imperialist policy of the Adenauer government."

Lukacs writing to his own group, says: "There must be many among us who know the name of Dr. Niemoller; he was here in Budapest for a meeting of the World Peace Council." (This is a communist-dominated "peace" council.) Lukacs says no more of Barth, but Lukacs undoubtedly knows that Barth has advised the Reformed in Hungary not to resist the Hungarian communist

government. Lukacs feels that he has grounds for being encouraged; despite a reactionary philosophy of government on the part of Kierkegaardians, there is, he says, "an interesting and fruitful contradiction" to that, namely, the *practical* policy of these men bids fair to promote *coexistence* with communism. Here is his argument: we should be encouraged and cheerful; Niemoller and Barth are against Adenauer (the West German chancellor) and attend our "peace" meetings and tell Christians under communist regimes not to be in opposition as they have advised the people in West Germany to be against Adenauer. That, it should be noted, is the view of a communist ideologist talking to his own associates!

5. Lukacs has a second hope, in this case in the Catholic church. He believes that there is evidence of an "inner crisis" in modern Catholicism. He refers to "worker priests" in France, and the efforts of the Catholic church to control the democratic mass movements ("Christian Social movement"). Lukacs takes courage and is pleased that the pope has spoken (1) against atomic warfare; and (2) has refused to accept identification of the Catholic church with western culture. Then Lukacs goes on to refer to Professor Wetter, of the Papal Academy in Rome, who has been promoting the idea that Thomist doctrine (the prevailing Catholic doctrine according to Thomas of Aquinas) and Marxist (communist) doctrine have similarities. This idea from Wetter's book is being developed by a professor in theology at Gratz (in southeastern Austria) named Reding. Reding has paid a visit to Moscow, and has taken "part in a discussion on atheism" at the Institute of Philosophy in the Moscow Academy of Sciences. This is the promising *coexistence* movement from the Catholic side. Lukacs adds:

> Although this new way of facing the problem is only beginning to emerge, I am convinced that it reflects a feeling among many Catholics that it would be fatal for the Church to tie itself unconditionally to the chariot of imperialist capitalism.

A friend who was in Europe last summer (1956) has expressed great anxiety about this program of the communists to develop *coexistence* of communism with Catholicism and the responsive action of some Catholics to the communist seduction; he believes that this

new infiltration is being skillfully executed by communists and that great damage has already been accomplished among Catholics.

As Protestants we may well take stock of the situation. Two prominent, influential leaders of Protestantism in Europe are Barth and Niemoller. These men are playing "footsie" with communism. The Lukacs and other communist ideologists are hopeful of developing fully with both Protestants and Catholics the idea of *coexistence.*

But the *coexistence* about which the communists talk really means infiltration, subversion, and eventual destruction of Christianity. We are being led like oxen to the slaughter. fn

Old-Testament Character Of Old Calvinism And Of Progressive Calvinism

We consider the Old Testament and the New Testament to be a unity. We do not consider that the teachings of Christ differ from the teachings of Moses. They are basically identical. The Scribes had interpreted Moses in a manner that changed the spirit of what Moses taught. Christ merely interpreted Moses in the only spirit in which it was correct to interpret Moses.

If that is accepted, then the Old Testament becomes a prime source of practical ethical ideas to guide this life. PROGRESSIVE CALVINISM is Old Testamentish and given to using the Law, Proverbs and the Psalms.

Weber* calls attention to the same characteristic of the Puritans and their contemporaneous fellow Calvinists. Weber writes:

> It is important to note that the well-known bibliocracy of the Calvinists held the moral precepts of the Old Testament, since it was fully as authentically revealed, on the same level of esteem as those of the New. It was only necessary that they should not obviously be applicable only to the historical circumstances of the Hebrews, or have been specifically denied by Christ. For the believer, the law was an ideal though never quite attainable

*Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*

norm while Luther, on the other hand, originally had prized freedom from subjugation to the law as a divine privilege of the believer. The influence of the God-fearing but perfectly unemotional wisdom of the Hebrews, which is expressed in the books most read by the Puritans, the Proverbs and the Psalms, can be felt in their whole attitude toward life. In particular, its rational suppression of the mystical, in fact the whole emotional side of religion, has rightly been attributed by Sanford to the influence of the Old Testament. (Page 123.) fn

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